

April 2009

Dear Colleagues,

**Happy Spring and welcome to the fourth issue of Eat Right Montana's 2009 campaign: *Going Green: Simple Steps for Healthy Families*.** This packet focuses on **gardening** which is 2009's hottest healthy habit! We explore several aspects of **GYO** (Grow Your Own) - from **community gardens** and **Extension Master Gardeners** to reaping the **food, fitness, and environmental benefits** of your very own back (or front) yard victory garden.

As a Native American proverb wisely notes: *We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.* **April 22, 2009, is the 39th anniversary of Earth Day.** The international celebration has a two-year theme of building a **Green Generation** to protect the planet for our children and grandchildren. For hundreds of ways to think globally and take local action, you can visit sites such as [www.earthday.net](http://www.earthday.net) and [www.earthday.gov](http://www.earthday.gov). It's never too late to connect with others and put a green twist on a spring event at your local school, club, or church. Small steps make a big difference when communities come together.

Protecting our planet means making every day Earth Day - making smart environmental choices every day of our lives. The simple tips in **Eat Right Montana's** 2009 packets provide a practical road map for helping families make those decisions even when times are tough. We can raise a green generation, be healthy, and save money - all at the same time.

The resources in this month's packet feature a variety of simple tips for the **Green Garden Generation**. We hope that you find many uses for this positive, everyday information:

- **Media Release - Gardening Green Across Big Sky Country: From Backyards to CSAs**
- **Healthful Eating - Five Smart Ways to Start Up a Vegetable Garden**
- **April Recipe - Creamy Pasta with Peas and Asparagus** (using Montana-made pasta)
- **Active Lifestyles - Five Fun Ways to Get Fit with Gardening**
- **Eco-Tips - Five Ingredients for Successful Composting at Home**

As always, we welcome your comments and suggestions. Although we have an outline for each packet, we are eager to incorporate your input whenever possible. Just send your thoughts along to me at [EatRightMT2000@gmail.com](mailto:EatRightMT2000@gmail.com) - and remember, past issues of **Healthy Families** and other ERM materials are available at [www.eatrightmontana.org/](http://www.eatrightmontana.org/).

*Dayle Hayes, MS, RD*

**Healthy Families** packets are made possible with the generous support of agencies, organizations, and individuals - like the wonderful 2008 sponsors listed on the right. Please help ERM continue our tradition of positive, practical health information by becoming one of our 2009 sponsors or with a supporting subscription of \$50 per year. To discuss sponsorship, please contact ERM Chair Katie Bark at [kbark@mt.gov](mailto:kbark@mt.gov).

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**Going Green: Simple Steps for Healthy Families 2009**

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April 1, 2009

## Gardening in Big Sky Country: From Backyards to Community Supported Agriculture

With a freshly dug garden on the White House lawn and Michelle Obama as the First Champion of local food, American families are going back to their roots - literally - in droves. Now that spring has arrived, the 2009 GYO (Grow Your Own) season is officially launched and everyone is predicting a banner year for the 21st century version of victory gardens.

"There is tremendous interest in the 'recession garden' idea," says Alice Burchak, MSU Extension agent in Toole County and community garden champion in Shelby. "Montana families are getting serious about gardening, both to reduce food costs and to enjoy fresher produce. When our committee began germinating the idea of a community garden in early 2008, we were surprised at how quickly plans grew and flourished. With land from the city of Shelby and numerous donations of labor, equipment, and supplies, we went from a bare lot to an amazingly productive garden in one short season."

The lush plots, raised beds, and wrought iron gate of the wheelchair-accessible Shelby Community Garden showcase just one example of the local gardening treasures sprouting across Montana. From Garden City Harvest's multiple programs in Missoula ([www.gardencityharvest.org/](http://www.gardencityharvest.org/)) to the Growing Community Project (<http://helenagcp.wikidot.com/start>) in Helena, Montana families are reaping the health and economic benefits of a more locally based food system.

According to Green House Technician Manny Morales, the organic USDA Demonstration Garden on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation promotes healthier lifestyles in several ways. "Our success is the result of many programs, including MSU Extension, Tribal Health, Diabetes Prevention, and Indian Health Service, coming together to raise awareness and teach gardening skills. This is our 11th year and we are seeing more and more families putting in their own gardens, as well as participating in our tours, taste testing, recipe sharing, and 'We Dig You Pick' Norland Red potato harvest."

Montana gardens come in all sizes, shapes, varieties, and flavors. Here are some ways to get your family involved:

- **Grow your own at home:** Personal gardens can be planted in almost anything - from simple containers on a porch to elaborate raised beds in the yard. Get good advice, plant good seeds, take good care, and enjoy the good food!
- **Connect with a community garden:** For a minimal fee, you can use a plot, share facilities (sometimes tools), and get tips from experts. Since existing space is expected to go rapidly this year, consider starting one at a park, school, or church.
- **Join a Montana-grown CSA (Community Supported Agriculture):** In a CSA, you buy a share and receive a portion of the farm's harvest each week during the season. Although many Montana CSA shares are sold out for this year, you can link to some CSAs at [www.aeromt.org/abundant/](http://www.aeromt.org/abundant/) and learn about others through your Farmer's Market this summer.

"Shelby's Community Garden is a place for gardeners of all ages to go green together," notes Alice Burchak. "It's exciting to see generations, from boomers to teens, working side-by-side to grow healthy produce for their families. We are also using the garden as a springboard for more education, such as compost workshops and training for Master Gardeners."

Past and current issues of Eat Right Montana's monthly packets can be downloaded for free at

[www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrightthehealthyfamilies.htm](http://www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrightthehealthyfamilies.htm)

## 5 Smart Ways to Start Up a Vegetable Garden

Want to join the hottest food trend of the year? A GYO (Grow Your Own) habit can be good for the budget, good for the body, and good for the soul! Never been much of a gardener before? No worries! Green thumbs are not a necessity and savvy growing advice is as close as your computer or local garden guru.

Want to find a personal go-to GYO expert? Ask the neighbor who always has beautiful veggies; most gardeners love to help newbies. Check with your Extension office about their Master Gardener program. These community volunteers are trained to provide exactly the kind of assistance you need. Get friendly with the folks at a nearby garden center or greenhouse. They understand local conditions and are usually more than happy to offer plenty of free instruction along with your purchase of vegetable seeds and plants.

### 1. Pick the right site.

Three critical elements are necessary to start a successful vegetable garden: (1) **Sunlight**, at least 6 hours a day throughout the growing season; (2) **Water**, the closer to a faucet or hose the better; and (3) **Soil**, something between rock-hard clay and soft sand. Fortunately, soil is something that you can improve over time. A home compost pile is one of best and easiest ways to do this - by recycling kitchen and yard waste into rich organic matter that is good for any garden soil.

### 2. Start small, grow over time.

Great big gardens can overwhelm the best intentions of anyone. The smartest strategy is to grow your garden slowly, as you learn what works best in your location and what your family likes to eat the most. You can start with a few containers on a deck or patio. Small theme gardens are fun for everyone: Try a **salad garden** (lettuce and other greens, herbs, tiny tomatoes, and maybe radishes) or a **pizza garden** (Roma tomatoes, onions, garlic, basil, oregano, and a pepper or two).

### 3. Pick the right seeds or plants.

Some backyard veggies grow well from seeds (carrots, radishes, beans, and peas, for example). Others do best with an indoor or greenhouse start, such as tomatoes, peppers, and herbs. While most garden varieties will do just fine anywhere, you may want to choose specialized seeds, such as plants for your specific latitude (e.g., northern mountains or central plains), heirloom varieties (generally non-hybrid, like your grandmother used to grow), organic, or open-pollinated.

### 4. Feed and water with care.

Throughout the growing season, your vegetable plants will need the right amount of moisture and the right balance of nutrients. Getting both right will depend on your soil and the weather. Too much water or fertilizer can be as big a problem as too little. The instructions on the seed packets or seedlings are always a good place to start. However, your best bet is to chat with a local garden 'coach' - a green-thumbed family member, friend, neighbor, or Master Gardener.

### 5. Pick the fruits and veggies of your labor.

While planting, weeding, and watering can be fun family activities, harvesting is obviously the tastiest part of the season. Freshly picked veggies can be so delicious (and nutritious) that they never make it to the kitchen or to the table! Want to grow your garden successfully from year to year? Keeping a simple garden journal can help you remember exactly what you planted, how well it grew, when you picked the veggies, and what your family enjoyed eating the most.

## Creamy Pasta with Peas and Asparagus

### Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup heavy cream (see substitutions for ways to reduce fat)
- 1/2 cup chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons lemon zest
- 12 ounces rotini pasta
- 1 pound fresh asparagus, trimmed and cut into 1-inch lengths
- 1 1/2 to 2 cups frozen peas
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 tablespoons fresh chopped parsley
- Salt and pepper to taste

### Instructions:

1. In medium saucepan over medium heat, bring cream, chicken broth, lemon juice and lemon zest to a boil.
2. Cook, stirring occasionally, until reduced to 2/3 cup, about 5 minutes.
3. In a large pot of boiling, salt water, cook pasta for 7 minutes.
4. Add asparagus and peas, bring back to a boil and cook until the vegetables are tender, about 3 to 4 minutes.
5. Drain the pasta and vegetables thoroughly in a colander and return to the pot.
6. Add the cream sauce, cheese and parsley; toss thoroughly.
7. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

**YIELD:** Four 1 1/2 cup servings as an entree or six 3/4 cup side dish servings

### Ideas/Substitutions

- Divided among four portions, the half cup of heavy cream translates into just 2 tablespoons per serving. To reduce fat and calories, you can reduce the size of the serving and/or substitute one of these for some of the cream: milk, light cream, condensed skim milk, light sour cream, or plain yogurt.
- Use local products whenever possible, such as fresh asparagus, peas, and parsley from your garden - or the highly-prized wild asparagus.
- Use whole wheat rotini or other whole grain pasta for added fiber and flavor.
- Mix other cheeses with Parmesan; try Romano or Asiago for their unique flavors.
- To reduce sodium, use low sodium chicken broth. Use vegetable broth for vegetarians.

### Nutrition Analysis

Serving Size: 1 1/2 cups

Calories: 320

Total Fat: 8.7 g

Calories from Fat: 24%

Saturated Fat: 4.9 g

Trans Fat: 0.0 g

Total Carb: 41 g

Dietary Fiber: 6.6 g

Sodium: 656 mg

Protein: 21 g

Calcium: 369 mg

Iron: 4.9 mg

### Recipe Source

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## 5 Fun Ways to Get Fit with Gardening

Want to spring into fitness, but short on cash for a gym membership? Love to be active outside, but not a fan of running, biking, or team sports? Here's an easy, inexpensive solution: Turn your yard and garden into a personal fitness center! Getting down and dirty in your garden can help you grow nutrient-rich produce for your family and help you grow a healthier body at the same time. Add the stress-reducing benefits of fresh air and sunshine - and you've got a win-win-win for your budget, your body, and your brain. Need more details than the tips below? Visit [www.gardenfitness.com/](http://www.gardenfitness.com/) or check out *Get Fit Through Gardening*, by Jeffrey Restuccio at a bookstore.

### 1. Warm up with a walk.

Research shows that 30 to 45 minutes of active gardening on most days of the week can provide the same health benefits as any other exercise routine. Since warm muscles are more flexible and less likely to get injured, always start with some aerobic activity. A brisk 5 to 10 minute walk will warm up your body and give you time to mentally plan your gardening projects for the day. Mowing grass can also work, especially if you use a push mower (which is also better for the air too).

### 2. Stretch carefully.

After a proper warm-up, stretching is the most important activity for gardeners who want to prevent injuries, aches, and pains, while improving flexibility. Safe stretching involves slow, controlled movements and holding the position for 30 seconds (no bouncing). Great garden stretches use trees, fences, tools, and the ground for support. For example, lie back on the ground with knees bent; slowly raise and lower both arms to the ground behind your head; repeat several times.

### 3. Flex your muscles.

Once your muscles are well warmed and gently stretched, you can get down to the heavy lifting of garden work. Always remember to start slowly and build up gradually as your muscles get stronger throughout the season. Muscle building in the garden can include everything from squats for legs and wall pushups for arms to lifting tools, pots, and bags instead of weights. Proper positioning prevents injuries, so check the resources listed above for photos on safe strength building.

### 4. Balance the load.

Several aspects of balance apply in the garden. For a complete routine, balance the time you work in different positions: sitting, standing, or kneeling. For balanced strength on both sides of your body, alternate right and left arms for raking, hoeing, and shoveling - and carry equal loads in both hands. Finally, practice total body balance by walking a straight line heel-to-toe, standing on one foot, or doing side leg raises - always using a wall, fence, or tree for support as necessary.

### 5. Reduce your stress.

Gardening should never be all work and no play. Take time to smell the roses, as well as the parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme. Many families find their gardens to be perfect places for personal reflection, meditation, or prayer. Two more tips to stay cool as a cucumber while gardening: First, water yourself as well as your plants, by keeping a bottle of cold, refreshing water close at hand. Secondly, wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunscreen, especially between 10 AM and 4 PM.

## 5 Ingredients for Successful Composting at Home

Creating a home compost pile is an easy, effective way to address several environmental issues at the same time. Composting at home allows you to recycle kitchen food waste and yard refuse without using any fuel to transport it somewhere. It also keeps a substantial amount of organic material out of your local landfill. And, the best of all, compost is a wonderful, nearly free way to improve the quality of your garden soil and the productivity of your fruit and veggie plants. For more detailed instructions on how to compost successfully at home, visit a local extension office or download [www.msuextension.org/ruralliving/Dream/PDF/Manure/Home\\_compost.pdf](http://www.msuextension.org/ruralliving/Dream/PDF/Manure/Home_compost.pdf).

### 1. Organic materials

With a successful home compost pile, nearly all plant-based material can be recycled. However, it is important to have the right balance of nitrogen waste (kitchen garbage from fruit, veggies, and grains, lawn clippings, manure, etc.) with carbon waste (garden plant foliage, straw, hay, bark, and wood chips, etc.). Expert composters suggest alternating layers of higher nitrogen ingredients (also called green materials) with the higher carbon items (sometimes referred to as brown materials).

### 2. Microbes, insects, and worms

In home compost, bacteria, fungi, insects, and worms do all the important work. As they live and reproduce in the pile, they decompose (break down) organic material into basic nutrients and soil components. Many of these microbes and bugs are already in the garbage and manure that is layered in the pile. Some home composters also like to add worm-rich soil occasionally; others keep the compost in direct contact with the ground, so earthworms can crawl up into the pile.

### 3. Oxygen

Compost needs oxygen for the right type of decomposition (aerobic) and to avoid the smelly gases produced by anaerobic (without oxygen) breakdown. Getting oxygen into the pile is as simple as turning the materials with a shovel or garden fork. The key is to get enough oxygen into the compost - without reducing the temperature. If you need help with the details of when and how much to turn your pile, check with a savvy neighbor, local Extension office, or garden store.

### 4. Heat

The temperature of compost is a key factor in maintaining a 'healthy' pile. While some decomposition will occur from 50°F to 105°F, the optimal temperature is between 110°F and 150 °F. The heat kills any disease-causing microbes, fly larvae, and weed seeds that happen to get into the pile. You can measure the temperature with a thermometer and protect your pile in several ways: by insulating the top in winter, keeping it out of the wind, and rotating materials from the outside in.

### 5. Moisture

Like the other ingredients in a successful home compost pile, moisture is a balancing act. Too much water will mat down the materials, leach out nutrients, and keep needed oxygen from reaching the microbes. Too little water will dry out the pile and prevent the materials from decomposing properly. In general, sprinkle rather than soak your compost pile. The best moisture level is like that of a damp sponge (one that has been wrung out) rather than a soggy, dripping towel.